

Teaching Workload and Physical Education Practice: A Comparative Analysis in the Post-Communist Eastern European Context

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ABSTRACT. This study provides a comparative analysis of the teaching workload of physical education and sport (PES) teachers in 17 countries across Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe: Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research highlights significant differences between countries with sustainable educational policies (Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, Czechia, Croatia) and those where teachers are overburdened and poorly supported (Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina). The results show that teaching workload varies between 16 and 21 hours per week, directly impacting teaching quality, teacher health, and the social prestige of the discipline. Positive models are characterized by reduced workloads (16–17 hours), official recognition of extracurricular activities, and investments in modern infrastructure. In contrast, high workloads (19–21 hours), combined with the lack of recognition of invisible work, lead to professional fatigue, demotivation, and lower quality of education.

Keywords: physical education, teaching workload, educational policies, Central and Eastern Europe, professional sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical education plays an essential role in developing healthy lifestyle skills and supporting public health. However, physical education and sport (PES) teachers face complex challenges, particularly in Eastern Europe, where the post-socialist legacy, underfunding of education systems, and inadequate infrastructure have shaped working conditions.

The teaching workload represents the central indicator of work volume and, implicitly, of the sustainability of the profession. In Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, differences between states are evident: some countries have adopted policies to reduce workload and recognize extracurricular activities (Slovenia, Greece, Estonia), while others maintain rigid models with high workloads and lack of logistical support (Romania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The working hypothesis of the study is that the current teaching workload does not reflect the specific demands of the PES profession. This leads to chronic fatigue, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced quality of education. Furthermore, comparative analysis can highlight reform directions necessary for Romania and other struggling states, by referring to sustainable models in the region.

Defining the Teaching Workload

In legal and pedagogical terms, the teaching workload represents the number of teaching hours established by law or national regulations that a teacher is required to perform weekly. It constitutes the visible and quantifiable part of the employment contract, usually associated with classroom teaching hours (National Education Law No. 1/2011, Romania).

In the specialized literature, the teaching workload is considered an indicator of formal work volume (Eurydice, 2022; OECD, 2021). However, in educational practice, teachers' activity far exceeds these hours, including lesson preparation, assessment, extracurricular activities, and continuous professional development.

Teaching Workload and Employment Contract

A teacher's employment contract is structured around two main components:

- Teaching workload – the number of direct classroom hours (e.g., 16–20 hours/week, depending on the country).

- Additional activities – invisible or contractually unrecognized hours, such as:

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- Lesson preparation;
- Student assessment and feedback;
- Extracurricular activities (competitions, camps, school projects)
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

For example, OECD (2023) emphasizes that although the official teaching workload may be 18 hours per week, the actual working time of teachers often exceeds 40 hours weekly, aligning with full-time jobs in other fields.

Table 1. Teaching workload and associated tasks of physical education teachers in Europe

Category	European range (hours/week)	Observations
Official teaching workload (teaching)	16–21	Set by law; varies between states (e.g., Estonia – 16, Hungary – 21)
Additional activities (preparation, assessment, extracurricular, CPD)	15–25	Not officially recognized in many countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia); partially recognized in Greece, Slovenia, Estonia
Total actual workload (teaching + additional activities)	35–45	Approaches full-time workload; confirmed by OECD reports (2019, 2021, 2023)

Note: The table highlights both the official teaching workload and the unrecognized yet essential additional activities in daily practice.

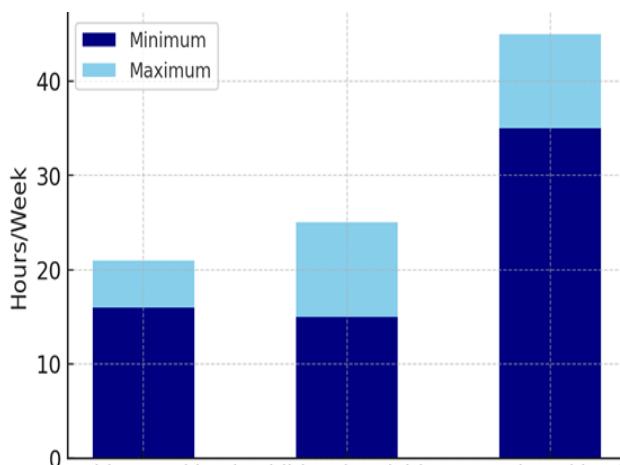


Fig. 1. Teaching Additional Activities

Source: Adapted from Eurydice (2022) and OECD (2019, 2021, 2023)

The previous comparative analysis reveals a significant discrepancy between the official teaching workload and the actual volume of work performed by physical education teachers. Although the law stipulates a limited number of teaching hours (16–21), the associated activities (lesson preparation, assessment, extracurricular activities, and continuous professional development) generate a total workload equivalent to a full-time schedule (35–45 hours per week).

This difference reflects the lack of formal recognition of complementary tasks in many educational systems, which can negatively affect teachers' motivation and professional status. In comparison, countries that partially or fully acknowledge these activities (such as Greece, Slovenia, or Estonia) provide a more balanced and transparent framework for teachers. Therefore, the results highlight the need for educational policies that explicitly integrate the actual workload in order to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of the profession.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was based on a comparative analysis of educational legislation and official curricular documents from 17 European states: Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The selection of the 17 states analyzed is not accidental: all shared the communist or post-communist experience, which profoundly influenced educational policies and the status of teachers.

This historical legacy explains structural similarities (chronic underfunding, rigid workloads, inadequate infrastructure) as well as current differences, depending on the pace and depth of reforms adopted after 1990. Analyzing these countries allows the identification of a distinct Eastern European pattern, different from that of Western states.

The inclusion of the 17 European states is based on a common historical and socio-political criterion: their full or partial belonging to the former communist bloc. This institutional and ideological legacy profoundly shaped the organization of educational systems, the regime of teaching work, and the social perception of the teaching profession.

After 1990, each of these states underwent a transition period characterized by curricular reforms, restructuring of the teaching workload, and adaptation to European standards. However, the pace and depth of these transformations varied considerably, which explains the current differences in teachers' workload and recognition of extracurricular activities.

Sources Used

- National legislation and official regulations regarding primary and secondary education, with emphasis on teaching workload and the role of physical education and sport teachers.
- Eurydice reports (2013, 2022, 2023), analyzing curricular structures and teacher workload across Europe.
- OECD reports and the European Commission Education and Training Monitor, offering a comparative perspective on educational trends.
- National studies and specialized articles (Balázs & Kovács, 2020; Radu & Prodea, 2021) on the impact of teaching workload on professional satisfaction.
- Data provided by ministries of education from the analyzed states, accessed through official online documents (2021–2023).

Procedure

A comparative table was developed, presenting weekly teaching workloads and the specific features of each country.

The analysis focused on three major dimensions:

1. Legislative framework and educational policies (workload, recognition of extracurricular activities, funding).
2. Professional and psychosocial dimension (teachers' perceptions of workload, risks of overwork, job satisfaction).
3. Impact on education quality (teaching methods, infrastructure, social prestige of the discipline).

Table 2. Teaching workload and specific features in Eastern Europe and the Balkans

Country	Teaching workload (hours/week)	Specific features
Romania (2025)	20	Recent increase; extracurricular hours unrecognized; poor infrastructure
Hungary	21	Daily Physical Education; high prestige; risk of overwork
Poland	18	Balanced workload; flexible schedule; EU financial support for infrastructure
Czechia	17	Reduced workload; modern infrastructure; focus on holistic education
Bulgaria	18	High workload; invisible hours unrecognized; modest infrastructure

Country	Teaching workload (hours/week)	Specific features
Estonia	16	Reduced workload; digital integration; focus on public health and active lifestyle
Lithuania	17	Close to Czechia; curricular reforms; focus on motor skills
Latvia	17	Flexible workload; focus on daily activity; community support
Serbia	19	Dual role teacher-coach; unpaid extracurriculars; limited resources
Greece	16	Reduced workload; extracurriculars officially recognized; adequate infrastructure
Slovakia	17	Moderate workload; strong institutional support; EU programs
Slovenia	16	Reduced workload; high discipline status; focus on school sport and inclusion
Albania	20	Chronic underfunding; lack of modern infrastructure; teachers use personal resources
Montenegro	18	Serbian influence; similar workloads; extracurriculars unrecognized
North Macedonia	19	High workload; financial and infrastructure issues; strong social role of teachers
Croatia	17	Flexible workload; modern infrastructure; EU programs implemented
Bosnia and Herzegovina	19	High workload; regional differences (Federation/RS); lack of curricular standardization

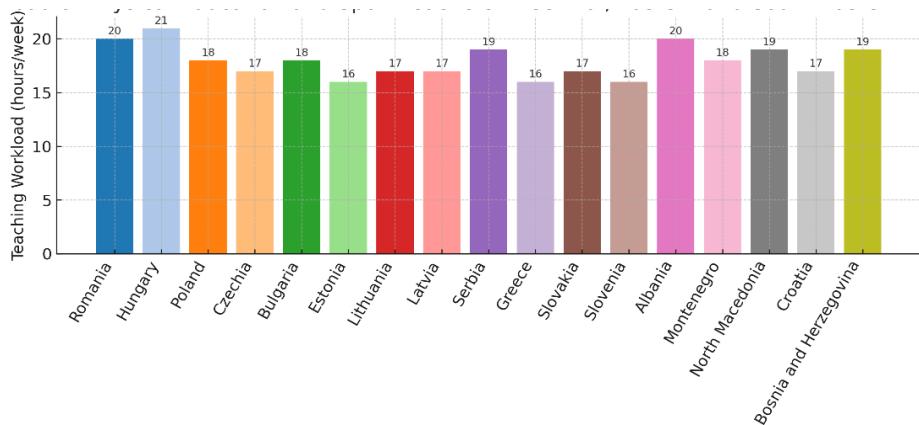


Fig. 2. Teaching Workload of Physical Education and Sport Teachers in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (2023–2025)

Source: Adapted from Eurydice (2022) and OECD (2019, 2021, 2023)

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of the teaching workload of Physical Education and Sport teachers in the 17 European states highlights significant differences both in terms of weekly workload and in how extracurricular activities and infrastructure investments are recognized.

Teaching Workload and Legislative Framework

The results presented in the chart highlight clear differences between regions. The Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) average approximately 16.7 hours per week, confirming their orientation toward sustainable educational policies. Central European states (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia) approach the European average with about 17.0 hours per week, benefiting from superior infrastructure and logistical support.

In contrast, Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) record a high average of nearly 19.2 hours per week, reflecting greater pressure on teachers and the lack of recognition of extracurricular activities.

The southern region (Greece, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria) is heterogeneous: Greece has a reduced workload (16), but Romania (20) and Hungary (21) raise the average to a high level of 18.8 hours per week.

These data confirm that positive models are concentrated in Northern and Central Europe, while major challenges are found in the Balkans and South-Eastern Europe.

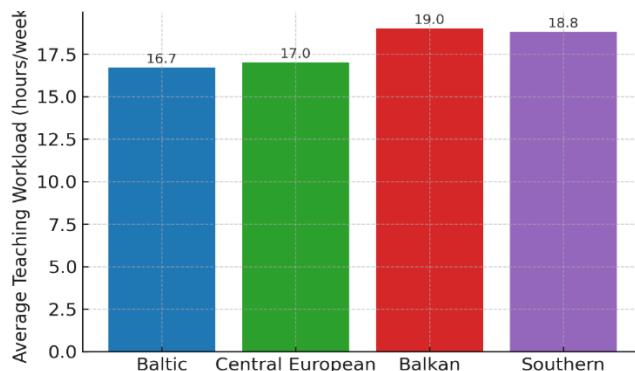


Fig. 3. Average Teaching Workload by Region in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (2023–2025)

Source: Adapted from Eurydice (2022) and OECD (2019, 2021, 2023)

High workloads (19–21 hours/week): Hungary (21), Romania (20), Albania (20), North Macedonia (19), Serbia (19), Bosnia and Herzegovina (19). These states maintain rigid models, associated with higher risk of overwork and lack of recognition of extracurricular activities.

Moderate workloads (17–18 hours/week): Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Moldova. In these countries there is a relative balance between workload and resources, although infrastructure differs significantly.

Reduced workloads (16 hours/week): Estonia, Slovenia, Greece. These represent positive models, where teachers have a sustainable teaching load and extracurriculars are officially recognized.

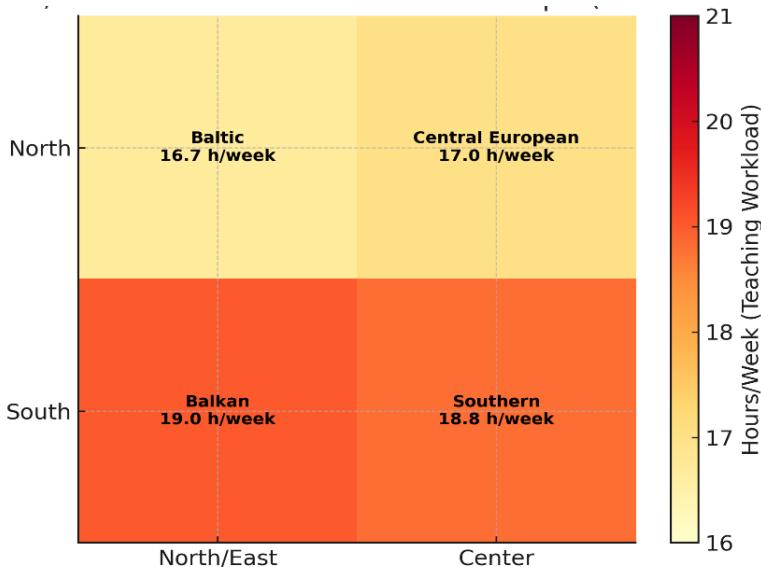


Fig. 4. Average Teaching Workload by Region (Colored Blocks) – Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (2023–2025)

Source: Adapted from Eurydice (2022) and OECD (2019, 2021, 2023).

The chart shows the distribution of the average teaching workload across major European regions. The Baltic and Central European countries maintain a sustainable level (16–17 hours per week), while the Balkan and Southern states frequently exceed 18–19 hours, which reflects greater pressure on teachers. This contrast confirms the structural differences between the educational models of the North and Center compared to those of South-Eastern Europe.

Professional and Psychosocial Dimension

In Romania, 72% of teachers consider the 20-hour workload too high, especially due to the lack of recognition of extracurricular activities. Similar problems are reported in Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Hungary, the implementation of daily physical education increased students' activity levels, but teachers complain of overwork and lack of complementary staff.

The Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) created a more favorable framework, with moderate or reduced workloads, integration of technology, and European projects. Teachers enjoy better social perception and institutional support.

In Slovenia and Greece, professional satisfaction is high due to reduced workloads, adequate infrastructure, and recognition of invisible work (extracurricular activities).

Impact on the Quality of Education

High workloads (19–21 hours) limit the diversification of teaching methods and increase the risk of professional fatigue, affecting the quality of education. Examples: Romania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Positive models (Greece, Slovenia, Estonia, Czechia, Croatia) demonstrate that reducing workload, combined with modern infrastructure and recognition of extracurriculars, leads to higher teaching quality and active student involvement.

Hybrid models (Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia) show a tendency toward balance: moderate workloads, European funding, and logistical support, though with regional differences in implementation.

DISCUSSIONS

The comparative analysis of the 17 states in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe highlights strong contrasts between sustainable educational models and systems still facing structural crises.

Regional Differences

The Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) invested heavily in infrastructure and digitalization, which allowed reduced workloads (16–17 hours) and increased professional satisfaction. Estonia stands out for integrating physical education into national public health strategies.

Central Europe (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia) shows balanced models: workloads of 16–18 hours, modernized infrastructure, and at least partial recognition of extracurricular activities. Slovenia is notable for the high status of the discipline and inclusion of school sport in social inclusion policies.

The Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) retain post-socialist characteristics: high workloads (18–20 hours), poor infrastructure, lack of recognition of extracurriculars. Teachers face strong social pressure and insufficient resources.

Romania and Bulgaria are in an intermediate but negative-trending position: high workloads (18–20 hours), lack of recognition of invisible work, and insufficient infrastructure. Romania's situation is worsened by the recent increase to 20 hours.

Greece represents a unique model in the region, with a reduced workload (16 hours) and official integration of extracurricular activities, leading to higher professional satisfaction and improved social perception of the discipline.

Positive vs. Problematic Models

Positive models: Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, Croatia, Czechia. All have reduced workloads (16–17 hours), modern infrastructure, and policies supported by education and public health strategies.

Problematic models: Romania, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these states, teachers feel overburdened, extracurricular hours remain unrecognized, and underfunding and lack of infrastructure exacerbate professional tensions.

Hybrid models: Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia. Although workloads are moderate, implementation varies regionally. These states benefit from European programs but maintain disparities between urban and rural environments.

Implications for Professional Sustainability

The data show that the professional sustainability of PES teachers depends on three key factors:

1. Weekly workload (teaching hours).
2. Official recognition of extracurricular activities (competitions, projects, camps).
3. Investments in school sports infrastructure and logistical support.

Countries that have managed to balance these factors report higher levels of professional satisfaction, teaching quality, and active student involvement in motor activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of PES teachers' workloads in 17 Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern European countries highlight major contrasts between countries with sustainable educational policies and those facing structural difficulties.

- *Variety of workloads*: workloads vary between 16 and 21 hours/week, reflecting significant differences between educational models.
 - Reduced workloads (16–17 hours): Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, Czechia, Croatia.
 - Moderate workloads (17–18 hours): Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Montenegro.
 - High workloads (19–21 hours): Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Recognition of extracurricular activities is an essential differentiating factor. Countries that officially integrate these activities (Greece, Slovenia, Croatia) report higher professional satisfaction.
- Infrastructure and resources largely determine the quality of education. Baltic and Central European states (Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Czechia) benefited from European investments, unlike Balkan states (Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), where deficiencies persist.
- Professional satisfaction is directly influenced by the balance between workload, official recognition, and logistical support. Positive models (Estonia, Slovenia, Greece) show that reducing workload and integrating extracurriculars increase both teaching quality and the social prestige of the discipline.

Recommendations

- Reduce teaching workload toward a sustainable range (14–16 hours), especially in countries with high workloads (Romania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia).
- Officially recognize and remunerate extracurricular activities, including competitions, camps, and community projects, as an integral part of the profession.
- Invest in school sports infrastructure (modern gyms, adapted equipment, accessible fields), prioritizing rural and disadvantaged regions.
- Reframe the role of the physical education and sport teacher as a public health agent, involved in preventing sedentary lifestyles and promoting active living.

- Align with European best practices (Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, Croatia) through knowledge transfer and pilot programs supported by the European Union and OECD.

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